THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF DEBATING IN ISLAM

Written by

SALIH BIN ABDULLAH BIN HUMAID

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Dear brothers,

This is an article about the rules and regulations of debate in Islam, containing the following elements:

1) Introduction to debate and its objectives.
2) The cause of differences in opinion between people.
3) A total explanation of rules of debate and its principles.
4) The explanation of its rules and characteristics.

I seek Allah's Guidance and Acceptance.

Preface

Praise be to Allah, the Almighty. May His Peace and Blessings be upon His Messenger, the noblest of His Creation and His chosen one among His Messengers, Muhammad; our master and our Messenger. He sent him with truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. He delivered the Message, fulfilled the task assigned to him, and gave good advice to the *Ummah* (Nation). He placed us on a clean and clear path; at night or day, it is the same, and no one deviates from it except the doomed. May Allah bless him, and may His grace and Peace be upon the Prophet's kith and kin, and on his noble wives, the mothers of believers. Peace and Blessings may be upon the Prophet's Companions and all believers, until the Day of Judgment.

DEFINITION

The word 'debate' (Arabic: *Hiwar* or *Jidal*) occurs in the Holy Qur'an as the following example shows:

{Indeed Allah has heard the statement of her (Khawlah Bint Tha'labah) that disputes with you (O Muhammad "p.b.u.h.") concerning her husband (Aus Bin As-Samit), and complains to Allah and Allah hears the argument between you both. Verily, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer.} (Q.58/1.)

In conventional usage, a debate is a discussion between two or more parties aiming at modification of opinions, proof of an argument, demonstration of the truth, falsification of suspicions, and a refutation of unfounded statements and concepts.

Some of the methods employed in debate are the laws of logic and the rules of syllogism such as cause and effect, as expounded in books on logic, theology, rules of research, polemics, and principles of jurisprudence.[1]

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[1] See Al-Zurqani, *Sharh Al-Mawaheb,* Vol. V, p 390.

OBJECTIVES OF DEBATING

The main objectives of a debate are the substantiation of the truth, with proof and refutation of doubts and fallacious statements and propositions. It follows that debate should be held, with the sincere cooperation of the debaters, to unveil the truth and state this to one's partner correctly. A participant ought to work towards revealing to his partner what the latter fails to perceive, and to follow the correct methods of inference in order to arrive at truth. Al-Hafiz Al-Dhahabi says, in this connection: "A debate is only justified to unveil the truth, so that the more knowledgeable should impart knowledge to the less knowledgeable; to stimulate a weaker intellect."[2] These are the original objectives that are so clear and plain.

Besides the main objectives, there are secondary or supportive objectives of debate. Some of these objectives are listed below:

- A general preliminary objective is getting acquainted with the other party's or parties' point of view.
- Reaching a compromise that satisfies all the

[2] See Al-Jirjani, *Ta'rifat,* under "Jadal",and *Al-Misbah Al-Muneer*," under 'Hiwar' and 'Jadal'.

parties concerned; for it is an important primary objective.

- Investigating, broad-mindedly, and bringing into play diverse approaches and conceptualizations, with a view of ensuring better and more feasible results, even for later debates.

DIFFERENCES AMONG PEOPLE IS A FACT

It is natural that differences will always exist among people; everywhere and at all times. There has always been diversity of color, language, customs, concepts, intellect and degrees of knowledge. This is a sign of Allah's omnipotence, as the following verse from the Holy Qur'an states

{And among His signs is this, the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours: verily in that are signs for men of sound knowledge.} (Q.30/ 22)

These external variations reflect internal variations: of opinions, attitudes and objectives. This also is mentioned in several places in the Holy Qur'an. Here is an example:

{And if your Lord had so willed, He could

surely have made mankind one *Ummah* [nation or community (following one religion i.e. Islam)], but they will not cease to disagree * Except him on whom your Lord has bestowed His Mercy (the follower of truth – Islamic Monotheism) and for that did He create them.} (Q. 11/ 118-119)

Al-Fakhr Al-Razi comments saying, "This verse indicates the diversity in people's creeds, moral standards and behavior."

I would like to elaborate the above verse by saying that had Allah so willed, all humans would have embraced one religion by instinct and original creation (Arabic: *Al-Fitrah)*. But in this case, they would cease to be human, in the way that we know them; their social life would be something similar to that of bees or ants, and in spirit they would be like angels, who are disposed by their creation to embrace truth and obey all that they are commanded to by Allah. There would be no room for conflict or disagreement among them. But Allah, in His Wisdom, has chosen to create humans otherwise. They have to acquire knowledge rather than have it as an inspired ability. They have the volition to choose what to do and to consider

different possibilities of outcome. They are not predestined to behave in a fixed way. They vary widely in their abilities and capacity for acquiring knowledge and preferences.

As for the phrase 'and for this did He create them,' in the above-quoted verse, it may not be presumed to mean that Allah created humans so that they should disagree. It is known from other texts that Allah created humans to worship Him. The meaning of the above phrase is rather that Allah created humans so that there would be among them a group of well-guided and a group of misguided; the former is destined to enter Paradise and the latter is to be punished in Hell.

In addition, the following may be deduced from the same phrase: Allah created humans so that they would, because of their diversity in abilities and disposition, choose different professions, and this would make for stability in the world. It is through humans that Allah carries out His ordinances. Men employ other men to do work for them.[3]

There is in the creation of humans the propensity for variation in learning, viewpoints and feelings;

[3] See *Ruh Al-Ma'ani* , Vol. IV, Chapter 12, p 164, and *Tafseer Al-Qasimi,* Vol. IX, p 182.

this in turn will lead to variation in will-power and preference, faith, obedience and disobedience are a part of this.[4]

[4] *Tafseer Al-Manar,* Vol. XII, p. 194.

THE SELF-EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH

Having asserted that variation in people's intellects, conceptions and propensity for conflict is a fact, it is important to add that Allah has highlighted the Path of the truth with landmarks and signs. If we refer again to the above verse, 'if thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people, but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord has bestowed His Mercy,' we see that the last part refers to this reality. In another verse this point is more obvious:

{Allah by His Leave guided those who believed to the truth of that wherein they differed.} (Q. 2/ 213)

Free from the control of desires and whims, the soul of man will not fail to arrive at the truth, if man searches diligently for it. Man has been endowed, since his original creation, with a guide (within himself) to indicate the truth. This is the essence of the following verse from the Qur'an:

{**So set you (O Muhammad "p.b.u.h." your face towards the religion (of pure Islamic**

Monotheism) *Hanifa* (worship none but Allah Alone). Allah's *Fitrah* (i.e. Allah's Islamic Monotheism) with which He has created mankind. No change let there be in *Khalq-illah* (i.e. the religion of Allah – Islamic Monotheism): that is the straight religion, but most of men know not}. (Q. 30/30)

The following tradition of the Prophet's replicates the same point:

"Every new born is endowed with *Fitrah* (Islamic Monotheism, original uncorrupted state). It is his parents who later make of him a Jew, Christian or Magus; in the same way animals are born whole, with the noses intact, but it is humans who later cut their noses."

The fundamentals of faith, the main virtues and the main vices, such as all sensible people would unanimously agree upon, are stated in the Qur'an in clear lucid language that leaves no room for dispute or misinterpretation. This part of the Book is called 'The Mother of the Book,' (i.e., the foundation of the Book), as it comprises all the rules (laws). No one may contradict such verses nor tamper with them to satisfy his whims or doubts. Nor may they be made the subject of

arbitrary or unjustified interpretation, as we will mention about the essence of debate. But excluding the above category, scholars may disagree about any other points. It is not a sin to differ; a scholar will be rather rewarded in the Hereafter when he errs in his judgment, and is even doubly rewarded when he is right. This is a great incentive for scholars to exert themselves and explain controversial issues with a view to revealing the truth and suggesting the best available course for the community. This is a manifestation of the great Wisdom of the Lord.

POINTS OF AGREEMENT

Stressing the points of agreement at the beginning ensures a cordial and amicable debate. It will also be a more fruitful and focused debate.

By stressing and dwelling on points of agreement a debater will be more likely to find a common ground and a good starting point for fruitful interaction. A cordial start will bridge the gap and help the debaters to proceed in a positive conciliatory manner

It would otherwise be confronted debate if the debaters raised controversial issues at the outset. If they do, they will have left little chances for a successful debate. It will be a narrow and tense debate. The participants may be inattentive to each other's view points; each looking for his chance to expose the other's slips or faults. Those who compete would become bitter rivals rather than reaching useful conclusions.

An experienced debater says in this regard: "Make your partner answer in the affirmative and try to prevent him from saying 'No', as far as you can, because once he says 'No', his pride will impel him to adhere to his word; an answer of

'No', is not just a monosyllable. The whole person's nerves, muscles and glands will be primed for it. It is a concerted drive to renounce. In contrast, the word 'Yes', is soft and costs little. It does not tax the body with any exertion."[5]

It would be helpful, in this regard, to make the other party aware of your sharing some of his conceptions, by declaring your approval of and satisfaction with his correct ideas and sound information. It would be an excellent achievement to attain a level of objectivity and impartiality.

Some of our scholars have observed that ignorance is mainly exhibited in denial and renunciation, rather than in affirmation. It is easier for a person to be on firm ground about what he asserts, rather than about what he denies. Therefore, disputes that bring about dogmatic attitudes are usually the result of being right about what one asserts but wrong about what one denies.[6]

PRINCIPLES OF DEBATING

Principle One:

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[5] Dr. Saleh Al-Suhaimi, *Tanbeeh Ulil Absar*, adapted.
[6] *Principles of Debate,* p. 46.

By adhering to scientific methods. Two of these methods are as follows:

1. Presenting evidence to prove or support a claim.
2. Observing accuracy while referring to authority.
   The above two methods have been neatly expressed by Muslim scholars in an aphorism, "If quoting, maintain accuracy; if claiming, provide proof."

The above rules may be supported with some verses from the Holy Qur'an:

{**Say (O Muhammad "p.b.u.h." produce your proof if you are truthful.} (Q. 2/111)**

{Say: Bring your proof. This (the Qur'an) is the Reminder for those with me and the Reminder for those before me.} (Q. 21/24).

{Say (O Muhammad "p.b.u.h." Bring here the *Turat* (Torah) and recite it, if you are truthful.} (Q. 3/93).

Principle Two:

Freedom from contradiction in the debater's statement and proofs. Evidently, contradiction

invalidates statements. Let us give two examples to illustrate this point:

1. Like other disbelievers, Pharaoh charged Prophet Moses, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him, with being a 'magician or madman.' Disbelievers, contemporary with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said the same of him. However, 'magic' and 'madness' are incompatible, as a magician is known for cleverness, wit and cunning, which is quite the opposite for a madman. This shows the absurdity of their charge.
2. The disbelieving Quraish charged the Prophet (pbuh) with supporting his claim with 'continuous magic'.
   Allah said:
   {And if they see a sign. They turn away, and say: This is continuous magic.} (Q. 54/2)

   This charge is, however, an obvious contradiction. Magic cannot be continuous, and what is continuous cannot be magic.

Principle Three:

A proof should not be a repetition of a claim. If it is so, it will not be a proof at all, but a

reiteration of a claim in different words. Some debaters are skilled at manipulating language so that what they say would seem to be a proof, but it is not more than restating the first assumption. It is a deviation from an honest and straightforward discussion towards finding the truth.

Principle Four:

Agreeing on indisputable and fixed basic issues. Such points can refer to a priority, intellectual concepts which are not contested by honest thinking persons; such as the goodness of truthfulness, the badness of lying, thanking a good-doer and punishing an evil-doer.

On the other hand, the basic issues can be religious concepts, which are common to the debaters.

By having solid (given) issues as a reference, it would be possible to discriminate between a truth-seeker and another who is only disputing for the sake of dispute.

In Islam, for instance, such matters as belief in the Oneness of Allah, His Attributes of perfection and freedom from imperfection, the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (pbuh), the Holy Qur'an as the Word of Allah, surrender to Allah's Judgment; such ordinances as the proper dress for

Muslim women, polygamy, prohibition of usury, alcoholic drinks and adultery, are all matters of certainty, and so may not be taken as dispute subjects for the believers.

Surrender to Allah's Judgment, for instance, is known to be part of the creed by such verses of the Qur'an, as the following:

{But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad "p.b.u.h.") judge in all disputes between them.} (Q. 4, 65)

{And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed (then) such (people) are the *Fasiqun* [the rebellious i.e. disobedient (of a lesser degree] to Allah.} (Q.5/47)

Similarly, proper dress for a Muslim woman is also categorically enjoined by such verses as:

{**O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies.} (33/59)**

It would be legitimate to lay down, for discussion such details as the use of the veil for the face, but the principle of proper dress, itself, is mandatory.

The same may be said of usury, which has

been prohibited in unequivocal terms. On the other hand, debates may be held concerning its details and practical examples used.

In view of the above, it would be a mistake on the part of a Muslim to have a debate with a communist or atheist about matters of the Islamic creed, such as the ones given above. As the other party does not accept the Islamic Truths, to begin with; the right starting points would be the principal religion, the God-hood and Lordship of Allah, the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (pbuh) and the truthfulness of the Holy Qur'an.

Therefore, we say it is a mistake on the part of some intellectuals and writers to raise issues like the application of the *Shari'ah*, a Muslim woman's proper dress, polygamy and similar topics, in the mass media, in articles and seminars, with a view to proving the legitimacy of such legislation.

It would not be wrong, on the other hand, if the purpose of raising such topics was to reflect on the wisdom and goodness of this legislation.

The distinction between the two purposes is supported by the following verse:

"It is not for a believer, man or woman,

when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision." (33/36)

The final point to understand about this principle is that sincere search for the truth is incompatible with the denial of established facts and prior truths.

Principle Five:

Impartial search for the truth, avoiding prejudice and observing the accepted ethics of debate.

What ensures a straightforward and fruitful debate is a resolute search for the truth, not allowing one's own desires or public opinion to influence the one. A sensible person, Muslim or non-Muslim, is expected to sincerely seek the truth and avoid errors.

Most of well-known Muslim scholars were very careful in this regard. Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali says in this connection, "Cooperation in seeking the truth is inherent to religion, but sincerity in the pursuit of it can be distinguished by certain conditions and signs. A diligent seeker of the truth may be compared to one who is looking for his lost

camel. It would be immaterial for him if he or another person should be the one to find it. Likewise, a sincere truth-seeker would perceive his partner as a helper, rather than an adversary, and would be grateful to him if he guided him to the truth."

Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i for instance, used to say, "I never spoke to someone but sincerely wished that Allah would keep him well, protect him from sin and misdeed, and guide him; and I never debated with someone, but sincerely wished that we would arrive at the truth, regardless as to whether it is first discovered by him or me."

In another place, volume 1 of *Al-Ihyaa',* Al-Ghazali says, "Over enthusiasm is one of the signs of a corrupted scholar, even if the case they defend is true. By showing excessive enthusiasm for the truth, and their showing contempt for their opponents, the latter would be stimulated to retaliate and react in the same manner. They would be driven to stand for falsehood and so justify the label attributed to them. If the champions of truth had spoken kindly to them, avoiding publicity and humiliation, they would have succeeded in winning them over. But as it is, a person who enjoys a place of prestige is strongly inclined to preserve his

position by attracting followers, and the only way to that is to boast, attack or curse adversaries."

To conclude, a debate must be conducted fairly and calmly, without showing any excitement or roughness, and without compromising the chances of arriving at the Truth. Debaters should avoid spiteful argumentation and word play; as such behavior would poison the atmosphere, arouse hostile attitudes and may well end in deadlock. This point will be expanded, at a later stage, by Allah's Grace.

Principle Six: Qualification of the Debater:

It is a fact that a possessor of a right should not be deprived from his right. It is also a fact that this right should not be given to any one who does not deserve it. Moreover this right does not entitle everyone to say anything he likes. It is not right for boundaries of his knowledge. It is not right for him to try to defend the truth when he is ignorant of it. It is not right for him to stand up for the truth when he is unable to defend it. Nor is it right for one to try to defend the truth when one is ignorant of the manifestations of falsehood. So, for a debate to run smoothly and to be fruitful, it is necessary for the participants to be sufficiently qualified for it.

To be qualified for a debate, a participant should have the right knowledge, i.e., specialized knowledge.

A layman is not equal to a specialist, and, so, the former may not argue with the latter regarding issues that fall within his field. We may learn a lesson from Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, who, as the Holy Qur'an relates, told his father, "**O my father! Verily there has come to me of the knowledge that which came not unto you. So follow me, I will guide you to the Straight Path." (19/43)**

It is unfortunate when a layman tries to contradict a specialist. It is better for him to have the modesty to come as a learner rather than find fault with a more knowledgeable person, without justification. One may learn a lesson from Prophet Moses, who, as we recite in the Qur'an, said in modesty to "the good servant of Allah" **"May I follow you, so that you teach me something of that knowledge (guidance and true path) which you have been taught (by Allah)? (18,66)**

Many debates fail because of the lack of equality between debaters. To quote *Al-Imam* Al-Shafi'i again, who says, "I have never debated with a knowledgeable person, but to have beaten him, and I have never debated with an ignorant person, but to have been beaten by him." Al-Shafi'i is here saying, in humorous turn of speech that it is in vain that unequal persons should debate.

Principle Seven:

Decisiveness and Relativity of Conclusions.

It is important to realize here that human opinions and ideas are not absolute. Only Prophets are infallible in what they attribute to Almighty Allah. The following aphorism, common among Muslim scholars, is useful in this connection, "My viewpoint is right, but could be wrong, and my adversary's viewpoint is wrong, but could be right."

Hence, it is not a pre-requisite for a successful debate that either party should accept the other party's opinion. Should it happen that both parties agree on one opinion, this would be excellent. But if they do not, the debate will still be successful, as long as each party realizes that the other party is justified in adhering to his views so that these views should therefore be tolerated.

In his *Al-Mughni,* Bin Qudamah, may Allah have Mercy on him, reports in this regard, "Some scholars used to excuse anyone who disagreed with them in debatable matters, and did not insist that he should accept their views." (The end of *Mughni's* speech.)

A debate would, however, be a failure if it resulted in discord, hostility or accusations of ill-will and ignorance.

Principle Eight:

Acceptance of and being satisfied with conclusions agreed upon by the debaters and all that this entails.

This means that the parties should take the conclusions seriously.

If this principle is not realized, then the whole purpose of debate will be in vain.

Bin Aqeel says, in this connection, "Let each one of the debaters accept the statements ofa the other party, supported by proof. By doing this, he will demonstrate his nobility and self-respect, and he will prove himself to be and acceptor of the truth.

Again, from *Al-Imam* Al-Shafi'i, May Allah be pleased with him, "I never debate with someone who accepts my proof, but I hold him in high esteem, and I never debate with someone who refuses my proof, but I lose all esteem for him."[7]

[7] *The Science of Polemics,* p. 14.

THE RULES OF GOOD CONDUCT IN DEBATING
THE ETIQUETTE OF DEBATING

1. Using only decent language and avoiding a challenging or overwhelming style.

One of the first characteristics of speech a debater should have is politeness of speech, especially during debates. Some verses from the Holy Qur'an will drive this idea home:

"And say to My slaves (i.e. the true believers of Islamic Monotheism) that they should (only) say those words that are the best." (17, 53)

"… and argue with them in a way that is better." (16,125)

"… and speak good to people [i.e. enjoin righteousness and forbid evil, and say the truth about Muhammad p.b.u.h.]" (2, 83)

It follows that a sensible person who speaks the truth should disdain from such

unbecoming methods as slander, ridicule, mockery, contempt and irritation.

It is interesting in this regard to notice how divine guidance, as we see in the Qur'an, directs Prophet Muhammad, (pbuh) not to scold the non-believers:

"And If they argue you (as regards the slaughtering of the sacrifices) say "Allah knows best of what you do". ❁ Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection about wherein you used to differ" (22,68 and 69.)
And say to them, **"And verily (either) we or you are rightly guided or in plain error." (34,24)** That was despite their clear misguidance.

A debater is recommended to avoid defying his opponent in order to overwhelm or embarrass him, even when his own evidence is decisive. To win someone's favor is better than to win a round against him. You may silence an opponent without winning his consent or acceptance. Intellectual proofs may be compelling, even without winning the good-will of the other

party. However, a sensible person should realize that it is more important to win people's heart than to push them into the corner. Also, raising one's voice and using strong language will only lead to malice and vexation. Therefore, a debater should avoid raising his voice, which only shows indiscretion and provokes the other party. Shouting will not prove one's point. On the contrary, it is mostly a mark of lack of evidence compensating for the weakness of one's evidence with noise. In contrast, a calm voice is usually indicative of a person's good reasoning and balance; it reflects an organized mind, with confidence and objectivity.

We must add, however, that a speaker will need to change his intonation in accordance with the progression of the discussion; it could be inquisitive, matter-of-fact, deprecating or exclamatory. Such variation wards off boredom and helps in delivering the message effectively.

Besides, there are certain situations, which may call for overwhelming and silencing of an opponent—if the latter

becomes too unreasonable or impervious to sensible argument. It is in reference to this that the Qur'an says'

{And argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses), except with such of them as do wrong .} (29, 46)

In another verse,

{Allah does not like that the evil should be uttered in public except by him who has been wronged.} (4, 148)

So, it is in such exceptional cases, where there is a glaring transgression, that forceful attack is permissible. Embarrassing an adversary in this case becomes a shaming of falsehood and folly.

Before we conclude this section, we would like to mention the advisability of avoiding the repetition of first person pronouns, singular or plural, when debating. The use of expressions like: 'in my opinion', 'in our experience' seems pedantic and egoistic to a listener and might

also be indicative of one's self-praise and having mixed intentions. Therefore, it would be more tactful to replace such expressions with: 'examination would reveal', 'experts have discovered', and the like.

It is also important, in a really good debate, not to be too laconic, assuming that the other party is very intelligent, nor too long-winded, assuming that the other party is stupid. A means should be struck between the two extremes.

People are quite varied in their intellectual ability and level of understanding. Some are broad-minded, some prefer caution and a safe course; others are much more tolerant and easy-going. Such differences will be reflected in the way people perceive a speaker's statements. Some will understand denotation, allusion and intention, but most fall far short of that.

2. Abiding by a specified time:

It must be firmly established, in the

debater's mind, not to expatiate upon a topic or monopolize talk beyond the requirements of tactfulness and polite social behavior.

> In his *The Art of Polemics* Bin Aqeel writes, "Let both parties take turns voluntarily, not forcibly, each allowing the other party to say all he wants to say before he speaks. Let a debater not interrupt the other, even when he can guess what the other wants to say from hearing part of his statement. Some people do that to call attention to their quick-mindedness and intelligence. Such people should not be too complacent, as their guess does not prove that they can disclose the unseen.
> It is merely that ideas lead to each other by association."[8]

> To determine whether a speaker has been too long-winded or moderate depends on the specific circumstances. In a symposium or conference, the chairman allots to every speaker a specific time, so he should abide by his given time. The situation is more relaxed at camps and trips,

[8] *The Science of Polemics,* p. 13.

as listeners have more spare time. Similarly, the situation in a mosque might be different from a university or other educational institution.

Now let us summarize the main causes of being long-winded and interruption of others, which are:

1) Arrogance.
2) Love of status and praise.
3) Believing that what one knows is unknown to others.
4) Being careless of all people's knowledge, time and circumstances.

A speaker who possesses any of the above qualities could cause the audience to become bored with him, wishing his talk to end quickly.

It is commonly known that a listener's capacity for listening and paying attention is limited, and so, if a speaker goes beyond that limit, a listener will become bored and distracted. Some experts have estimated that time to be fifteen minutes. However, a speaker should try to conclude his talk while people are enjoying what he

says, rather than waiting until they hope for a conclusion of his volubility.

3. Attentive listening and avoiding interruption:

Just as abiding by a specific time for talking is important, it is equally important to listen, politely and attentively, to the other speaker until he has finished his statement. It would be a mistake to concentrate on what you are going to say without paying attention to his statement. In this regard, there is some advice given by Al-Hassan, son of Ali, to his son, may Allah be pleased with them: "If you sit with scholars, my son, be more interested in listening than in speaking. Learn good listening just as you learn good speaking. Never interrupt a speaker, even if he speaks for long, until his speech comes to an end."

There is also a relevant statement by Bin Al-Muqaffa', "Learn good listening just as you learn good speaking. To be a good listener you should give a speaker time until he concludes, so as not to appear too anxious in reply. Direct your face and gaze at the speaker, and try to understand what he says."

The popular expression: ‘a conversation with a deaf person’ describes the situation when each party is concentrating on his own utterance without listening to what the other has to say, although they are supposed to be conducting a dialogue.

Good listening provides a firm basis for the exchange of ideas while pinpointing issues of disagreement. By listening attentively, a debater is sure to receive respect, for it results in a feeling of relaxation, appreciation and earnestness. All this paves the way to achieving the desired result.

4. Respecting an adversary:

It is essential during a debate that participants respect each other and recognize each other’s position and status; the right titles and polite forms of address should be maintained.

Having mutual respect for one another, helps one accept and offset any self-defense and selfishness. On the other hand, it is disgraceful and hence prohibited to despise other people. By this, we do not mean that one

should hesitate to advice and correct mistakes- but only that this should be done decently and respectfully.Respect and appreciation are quite different from flattery and hypocrisy.

To complete this point, we add that a debater should direct his attention to the matter in hand; discussing, analyzing, criticizing, providing evidence and refuting. He should not discuss the personality of his adversary. Otherwise, the meeting would turn into a verbal duel, with all bare slander and insult. This would not show devotion to the discussion of issues and ideas, but only to the discussion of personalities, qualifications and behavior.

5. Confining debates to a specified place:

Muslim scholars have pointed out that debates and disputes should be private, attended only by selected individuals. This, they say, is more conductive to intensive thinking, clarity of minds and honest intentions. In contrast, a large audience is more conductive to pomposity and aggressiveness even when defending a false case.

The following verse from the Holy Qur'an has been quoted in support of the above

guidance:

{Say (to them O Muhammad p.b.u.h. 'I exhort you to one (thing) only: that you stand up for Allah,s sake in pairs and singly, and reflect (within yourselves the life history of the Prophet, p.b.u.h.} (34,46)

When a large number of people meet, in a crowd or a mob, the effect is to blur rational or clear thinking. Usually, the majority of a crowd would not be well informed; hence, this would more likely create a demagogic atmosphere in which the crowd would take any side blindly. On the other hand, a few knowledgeable persons would focus much more effectively. Besides, it would be easier for a person in error to accept correction, while he may be very unwilling to concede to an error in the presence of a large audience.

It is with such considerations that the above verse ordered Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to call the disbelievers to give up their demagogic ways and discuss matters in the frame of small groups.

We may refer to an incident from the period just after the advent of Islam that may shed light on the situation under discussion.

Biographers of the Prophet (pbuh) relate that three of the Quraishite disbelievers: Abu Sufyan Bin Harb, Abu Jahl Bin Hisham and Al-Akhnas Bin Shuraiq Bin Amr Al-Thaqafi, emerged separately from their homes, one night, to listen to the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) recite some verses from the Qur'an. They sat in the dark around the Messenger's home, yet none of them was aware of the presence of the other two. They remained stationed there, listening until dawn. But on their way back they met each other and blamed each other. Someone said, "Should a commoner see you, he would become suspicious, so we should never do this again." The following night, however, each one stationed himself as he had done the previous night, and listened to the Prophet (pbuh) reciting until dawn. Again, they met on their way back, and they repeated what they had said the night before. The same thing happened at the third night, but this time they pledged never to return again.

In the morning, Al-Akhnas Bin Shuraiq took his staff and went to Abu Sufyan's house to speak to him. "What do you think, father of

Hanzalah?"[9]
He said, "Of what you heard from Muhammad?" "By Allah, father of Tha'labah,"

he replied, "I have heard things that sound familiar which I can understand, and have also heard things that sound unfamiliar which I cannot understand." "It has been the same for me, by Allah," Al-Akhnas rejoined. Then he left Abu Sufyan and went to Abu Jahl's home. On meeting him he asked, "What do you think, father o Al-Hakam, of what you heard from Muhammad?" "What I heard?" replied Abu Jahl, "We have competed with the clan of Abdu Munaf in all matters: they have been hospitable and we have been hospitable; they have provided transport animals and we have provided transport animals; they have been giving freely and we have been giving freely. But now, at the time we are with them, neck to neck; there rises a man from among them who they say is a prophet on whom descends revelation from heaven! How could we beat them at that? By Allah, we shall never believe in him." So, Al-Akhnas arose and walked

[9] A traditional way of calling a man as the father of his eldest son, indicating respect.

away.

6. ***Ikhlas:*** **Sincerity (to Allah's Cause)**
The quality of *Ikhlas* is complementary to the one mentioned above, concerning the impartial search for the truth. A debater must train himself to seek nothing, during a debate, but Allah's Pleasure.

The most prominent manifestation of lack of sincerity (*Ikhlas*) is to be motivated by pomposity, pedantry, and overshadowing peers. To seek praise and admiration from others is a base drive that a debater should avoid.

To instill the right intention, one should ask oneself the following questions: 'Is there any personal advantage that may come to one as a result of this participation?' "Does one aim at achieving a great reputation or simply gratifying one's desire to speak?' 'Does one wish to see disharmony and discord take place?'
To achieve real profit, one should be aware of the beguiling of the devil, seeking nothing but Allah's Pleasure, in thinking that one is standing for the truth while one really seeks exhibitionism and gratifying

one's desires.
One criterion that shows the honesty of one's intentions is to be satisfied and pleased if the other party should be the one to find the truth. One should really encourage the other person, should he be in the right. That is because truth is not the property of any group or individual. An honest person's objective is to see the truth prevail everywhere, no matter from what source it comes or who expresses it.

One obvious mistake in this regard is to think that none, but you, loves the truth or defend it.

It would be admirable for one to stop the discussion if one perceives that one no longer speaks from a desire to find the truth, but rather has selfish motives, such as obstinacy and aggressiveness.
This is the little that can be presented, by His Grace. May Allah guide us, and may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Muhammad, his kith and kin.

Saleh Bin Abdullah Bin Humaid
Makkah Al-Mukarramah

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